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GameCube

The **GameCube**[b] is a home video game console released by Nintendo in Japan and North America in 2001 and Europe and Australia in 2002. The sixth generation console is the successor to the Nintendo 64 and competed with Sony's PlayStation 2 and Microsoft's Xbox.

The GameCube is the first Nintendo console to use optical discs as its primary storage medium. The discs are in the miniDVD format and the system was not designed to play full sized DVDs or audio CDs. The console supports online gaming for a small number of games via the broadband or modem adapter and connects to the Game Boy Advance via the link cable, allowing players to access exclusive in-game features using the handheld as a second screen and controller.

Contemporary reception of the GameCube was generally positive. The console was praised for its controller, extensive software library and high-quality games, but was criticized for its exterior design and lack of features. Nintendo sold 21.74 million GameCube units worldwide before it was discontinued in 2007. Its successor, the Wii, some models of which have backward compatibility with most GameCube software, was released in November 2006.

Contents

History

Nintendo GameCube	
An indigo GameCube console with its controller and the 251-block memory card	
Also known as	Dolphin (code name)
Developer	Nintendo
Manufacturer	Nintendo
	Foxconn
Type	Home video game console
Generation	Sixth generation
Release date	JP: September 14, 2001[2]
	NA: November 18, 2001[1]
	EU: May 3, 2002[3]
	AU: May 17, 2002
Retail availability	2001–2007
Discontinued	WW: 2007[4]
Units sold	Worldwide: 21.74 million
	Americas: 12.94 million
	Japan: 4.04 million
	Other regions: 4.77 million[5]
Media	GameCube Game Disc
	Game Pak (Game Boy Player required)
Operating system	Dolphin OS
CPU	IBM PowerPC Gekko @ 486 MHz

In 1997, a graphics hardware design company called ArtX was launched, staffed by twenty engineers who had previously worked at SGI on the design of the Nintendo 64's graphics hardware. The team was led by Dr. Wei Yen, who had been SGI's head of Nintendo Operations, the department responsible for the Nintendo 64's fundamental architectural design.[7][8]

Partnering with Nintendo in 1998, ArtX began the complete design of the system logic and of the graphics processor (codenamed "Flipper")[9] of Nintendo's sixth generation video game console, reportedly bearing the early internal code name of "N2000".[10] At Nintendo's press conference in May 1999, the console was first publicly announced as "Project Dolphin", the successor to the Nintendo 64.[8][11] Subsequently, Nintendo began providing development kits to game developers such as Rare and Retro Studios.[12] Nintendo also formed a strategic partnership with IBM, who created the Dolphin's CPU, named "Gekko".[12]

ArtX was acquired by ATI in April 2000, whereupon the Flipper graphics processor design had already been mostly completed by ArtX and was not overtly influenced by ATI.[7][9] In total, ArtX team cofounder Greg Buchner recalled that their portion of the console's hardware design timeline had arced from inception in 1998 to completion in 2000.[7] Of ATI's acquisition of ArtX, an ATI spokesperson said, "ATI now becomes a major supplier to the game console market via Nintendo. The Dolphin platform is reputed to be king of the hill in terms of graphics and video performance with 128-bit architecture."[13]

The console was announced as the Nintendo GameCube at a press conference in Japan on August 24, 2000,[14] abbreviated as "NGC" in Japan[15] and "GCN" in North America.[16] Nintendo unveiled its software lineup for the sixth generation console at E3 2001, focusing on fifteen launch games, including *Luigi's Mansion* and *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader*.[17] Several games originally scheduled to launch with the console were delayed.[18] It is also the first console in the company's history not to accompany a *Super Mario* platform game at launch.[19]

Storage	None
Removable storage	GameCube memory card (16 MB max. capacity)
Display	Composite video S-Video (NTSC consoles only) RGB SCART (PAL consoles only) YP_BP_R component video/d-terminal (DOL-001 models only)[a]
Graphics	ATI Flipper @ 162 MHz
Sound	Analog stereo (Dolby Pro Logic II)
Controller input	GameCube controller, WaveBird, Game Boy Advance, various other input devices
Connectivity	GameCube online functionality
Online services	Limited
Dimensions	5.9 × 6.3 × 4.3 in 149 × 160 × 112 mm (width × depth × height)
Best-selling game	*Super Smash Bros. Melee*, 7.09 million (as of March 10, 2008)[6]
Predecessor	Nintendo 64
Successor	Wii
Related articles	Panasonic Q

Long before the console's launch, Nintendo had developed and patented an early prototype of motion controls for the GameCube, with which developer Factor 5 had experimented for its launch games.[20][12] An interview quoted Greg Thomas, Sega of America's VP of Development as saying, "What does worry me is Dolphin's sensory controllers [which are rumored to include microphones and headphone jacks] because there's an example of someone thinking about something different." These motion control concepts would not be deployed to consumers for several years, until the Wii Remote.[12]

Prior to the Nintendo GameCube's release, Nintendo focused resources on the launch of the Game Boy Advance, a handheld game console and successor to the original Game Boy and Game Boy Color. As a result, several games originally destined for the Nintendo 64 console were postponed in favor of becoming early releases on the GameCube. The last first-party game in 2001 for the Nintendo 64 was released in May, a month before the Game Boy Advance's launch and six months before the GameCube's, emphasizing the company's shift in resources. Concurrently, Nintendo was developing software for the GameCube which would provision future

connectivity between it and the Game Boy Advance. Certain games, such as *The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures* and *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles*, can use the handheld as a secondary screen and controller when connected to the console via a link cable.[21][22]

Nintendo began its marketing campaign with the catchphrase "The Nintendo Difference" at its E3 2001 reveal.[17] The goal was to distinguish itself from the competition as an entertainment company.[23] Later advertisements push the slogan, "Born to Play", and video game commercials feature a rotating cube animation that morphs into a GameCube logo and ends with a voice whispering, "GameCube".[24][25] On May 21, 2001, the console's launch price of US$199 was announced, US$100 lower than that of the PlayStation 2 and Xbox.[26]

The GameCube launched in Japan on September 14, 2001.[27] Approximately 500,000 units were shipped in time to retailers.[28] The console was scheduled to launch two months later in North America on November 5, 2001, but the date was pushed back in an effort to increase the number of available units.[29] The console eventually launched in North America on November 18, 2001, with over 700,000 units shipped to the region.[30] Other regions followed suit the following year beginning with Europe in the second quarter of 2002.[31]

On April 22, 2002, veteran third party Nintendo console developer Factor 5 announced its 3D audio software development kit titled MusyX. In collaboration with Dolby Laboratories, MusyX provides motion-based surround sound encoded as Dolby Pro Logic II.[32]

Hardware

Howard Cheng, technical director of Nintendo technology development, said the company's goal was to select a "simple RISC architecture" to help speed development of games by making it easier on software developers. IGN reported that the system was "designed from the get-go to attract third-party developers by offering more power at a cheaper price. Nintendo's design doc for the console specifies that cost is of utmost importance, followed by space."[10] Hardware partner ArtX's Vice President Greg Buchner stated that their guiding thought on the console's hardware design was to target the developers rather than the players, and to "look into a crystal ball" and discern "what's going to allow the Miyamoto-sans of the world to develop the best games".[7]

> We thought about the developers as our main customers. In particular for GameCube, we spent three years working with Nintendo of America and with all sorts of developers, trying to understand the challenges, needs, and problems they face. First among these is the rising cost of development. The GameCube can see high performance without too much trouble; it isn't a quirky design, but a very clean one. It was important we didn't require jumping through hoops for high performance to be achieved. On top of that, it is rich in features, and we worked to include a dream group of technical features that developers requested.
>
> —Greg Buchner, ArtX's Vice President[33]

Initiating the GameCube's design in 1998, Nintendo partnered with ArtX (then acquired by ATI Technologies during development) for the system logic and the GPU,[9] and with IBM for the CPU. IBM designed a PowerPC-based processor for the next-generation console, known as Gekko, which runs at 485 MHz and features a floating point unit (FPU) capable of 1.9 GFLOPS. Designed at 0.18 microns and described as "an extension of the IBM Power PC architecture", Gekko features IBM's reportedly then-unique copper-based chip manufacturing technology.[8] Codenamed "Flipper", the GPU runs at 162 MHz and, in addition to graphics, manages other tasks through its audio and input/output (I/O) processors.[34][35][36][37]

The GameCube introduced a proprietary miniDVD optical disc format as the storage medium for the console, capable of storing up to 1.5 GB of data.[38] The technology was designed by Matsushita Electric Industrial (now Panasonic Corporation) which utilizes a proprietary copy-protection scheme – different from the Content Scramble System (CSS) found in standard DVDs – to prevent unauthorized reproduction.[39] The Famicom Data Recorder, Famicom Disk System, SNES-CD, and 64DD had explored various complementary storage technologies, but the GameCube was Nintendo's first console to move away from cartridge-based media altogether.[40] The GameCube's 1.5 GB mini-disc have sufficient room for most games, although a few games require an extra disc, higher video compression, or removal of content present in versions on other consoles. By comparison, the PlayStation 2 and Xbox, also sixth-generation consoles, both use 8.5 GB Dual-Layer DVDs.

Like its predecessor, the Nintendo 64, GameCube models were produced in several different color motifs. The system launched in "Indigo", the primary color shown in advertising and on the logo, and in "Jet Black".[41] A year later, Nintendo released a "Platinum" limited edition GameCube, which uses a silver color scheme for both the console and controller.[42] A "Spice" orange-colored console was eventually released as well only in Japan, though the color scheme could be found on controllers released in other countries.[43]

Nintendo developed stereoscopic 3D technology for the GameCube, and one launch game, *Luigi's Mansion*, supports it. However, the feature was never enabled outside of development. 3D televisions were not widespread at the time, and it was deemed that compatible displays and crystals for the add-on accessories would be too cost-prohibitive for the consumer.[44][45][46] Another unofficial feature are two audio Easter eggs that can be invoked when the console is turned on. When the power is activated with the "Z" button on the Player 1 controller held down, a more whimsical startup sound is heard in place of the standard one. With four controllers connected, holding down the "Z" button on all four simultaneously produces a "ninja-like" tune at startup.[47]

Storage

The GameCube features two memory card ports for saving game data. Nintendo released three official memory card options: Memory Card 59 in gray (512 KB), Memory Card 251 in black (2 MB), and Memory Card 1019 in white (8 MB). (Though often advertised in Megabits, as 4 Mb, 16 Mb, and 64 Mb respectively.) A few games were known to have compatibility issues with the Memory Card 1019, and at least two games have save issues with any size.[48] Memory cards with larger capacities were released by third-party manufacturers.[49]

Memory Card 59

Controller

Nintendo learned from its experiences – both positive and negative – with the Nintendo 64's three-handled controller design and went with a two-handled, "handlebar" design for the GameCube. The shape was made popular by Sony's PlayStation controller released in 1994 and its follow-up DualShock series of gamepads introduced in 1997. In addition to vibration feedback, the DualShock series was well known for having two analog sticks to improve the 3D experience in games. Nintendo and Microsoft designed similar features in the controllers for their sixth-generation consoles, but instead of having the analog sticks parallel to each other, they chose to stagger them by swapping the positions of the directional pad (d-pad) and left analog stick. The GameCube controller features a total of eight buttons, two analog sticks, a d-pad, and an internal rumble motor. The primary analog stick is on the left with the d-pad located below and closer to the center. On the right are four buttons: a large, green "A" button in the center, a smaller red "B" button to the left, an "X" button to the right, and a "Y" button at the top. Below and to the inside is a yellow "C" analog stick, which often serves a variety of in-game functions, such as controlling the camera angle. The Start/Pause button is located in the middle, and the rumble motor is encased within the center of the controller.[50][51][52]

Indigo GameCube controller

On the top of the controller are two "pressure-sensitive" trigger buttons marked "L" and "R". Each essentially provides two functions: one analog and one digital. As the trigger is depressed, it emits an analog signal which increases the more it is pressed in. Once fully depressed, the trigger "clicks" registering a digital signal that can be used for a separate function within a game. There is also a purple, digital button on the right side marked "Z".[53]

Unique to the GameCube is the controller's prominent size and placement of the A button. Having been the primary action button in past Nintendo controller designs, it was given a larger size and more centralized placement for the GameCube. The rubberized analog stick in combination with the controller's overall button orientation was intended to reduce the dreaded "Nintendo thumb" – a term used to describe pain in any part of the hands, wrists, forearms, and shoulders as a result of long-term play.[54][55]

In 2002, Nintendo introduced the WaveBird Wireless Controller, the first wireless gamepad developed by a first-party console manufacturer. The RF-based wireless controller is similar in design to the standard controller. It communicates with the GameCube by way of a wireless receiver dongle connected to one of the console's controller ports. Powered by two AA batteries, which are housed in a compartment on the underside of the controller, the WaveBird lacks the vibration functionality of the standard controller. In addition to the standard inputs, the WaveBird features a channel selection dial – also found on the receiver – and an on/off switch. An orange LED on the face of the controller indicates when it is powered on. The controller is available in light grey and platinum color schemes.[56]

Compatibility

The GameCube is unable to play games from other Nintendo home consoles, but with the Game Boy Player attachment, it is able to play Game Boy, Game Boy Color, and Game Boy Advance games.[57] The GameCube's successor, the Wii, supports backward compatibility with GameCube controllers, memory cards, and games. However, later revisions of the Wii – including the "Family Edition" released in 2011 and the Wii Mini released in 2012 – dropped support for all GameCube hardware.[58][59]

A Platinum Nintendo GameCube with a WaveBird controller and Game Boy Player attachment

Panasonic Q

A hybrid version of the Nintendo GameCube with a commercial DVD player, called Q, was developed by Panasonic as part of the deal struck with Nintendo to develop the optical drive for the original GameCube hardware. Featuring a completely revised case, the Q overcomes the size limitation of the original GameCube's miniDVD tray by adding a commercial DVD-sized tray, among other hardware revisions. Released exclusively to Japan in December 2001, low sales resulted in the Q being discontinued in December 2003.

Software library

In its lifespan of 2001—2007, more than 600 games were released for the GameCube.[60][61]

Nintendo is traditionally recognized for releasing innovative, first-party games, most notably from the *Super Mario* and *The Legend of Zelda* series. These first-party series continued on the GameCube and bolstered the console's popularity. As a publisher, Nintendo also focused on creating new franchises, such as *Pikmin* and *Animal Crossing*, and renewing some that skipped the Nintendo 64 platform, most notably the *Metroid* series with the release of *Metroid Prime*. The console also saw success with the critically acclaimed *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* and *Super Mario Sunshine*, and its best-selling game, *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, which sold 7 million copies worldwide. Though committed to its software library, however, Nintendo was still criticized by some for not featuring enough games during the console's launch window

Early in Nintendo's history, the company had achieved considerable success with third-party developer support on the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and Super NES (SNES). Competition from the Sega Genesis and Sony's PlayStation in the 1990s changed the market's landscape, however, and reduced Nintendo's ability to obtain exclusive, third-party support on the Nintendo 64. The console's cartridge-based media was also increasing the cost to manufacture software, as opposed to the cheaper, higher-capacity optical discs used by the PlayStation.[62][63]

With the GameCube, Nintendo intended to reverse the trend as evidenced by the number of third-party games available at launch. The new optical disc format introduced with the GameCube increased the capacity significantly and reduced production costs. The strategy mostly worked. High-profile exclusives such as *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader* from Factor 5, *Resident Evil 4* from Capcom, and *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* from Konami were very successful. Sega, which focused on third-party development following the demise of its Dreamcast console, offered a vast amount of support for the GameCube porting old favorites

over such as *Crazy Taxi* and *Sonic Adventure 2*. The company also started new franchises on the GameCube including *Super Monkey Ball*. Several third-party developers were contracted to work on new games for existing Nintendo franchises, including *Star Fox Assault* by Namco and *Wario World* from Treasure.[60][62]

Some third-party developers, such as Ubisoft,[64] THQ,[65] Disney Interactive Studios,[66] Humongous Entertainment and EA Sports,[67] continued to release GameCube games well into 2007.

Online gaming

Eight GameCube games support network connectivity, five with Internet support and three with local area network (LAN) support.[68][69] The only Internet capable games released in western territories are three role-playing games (RPGs) in Sega's *Phantasy Star* series: *Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II, Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II Plus,* and *Phantasy Star Online Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution.*[68] The official servers were decommissioned in 2007, but players can still connect to fan maintained private servers.[70][71] Japan received two additional games with Internet capabilities, a cooperative RPG, *Homeland* and a baseball game with downloadable content, *Jikkyō Powerful Pro Yakyū 10.*[68][69] Lastly, three racing games have LAN multiplayer modes: *1080° Avalanche, Kirby Air Ride,* and *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!.* These three games can be forced over the Internet with third-party PC software capable of tunneling the GameCube's network traffic.[72][73]

A GameCube with a broadband adapter installed and a connected ethernet cable. ASCII Corporation produced a keyboard controller to help players communicate in *Phantasy Star Online*

To play online, players must install an official broadband or modem adapter in their system since the GameCube does not have out of the box network capabilities. Nintendo never commissioned any servers or Internet services to interface with the console, but allowed other publishers to do so and made them responsible for managing the online experiences for their games.[74]

Reception

The Nintendo GameCube received generally positive reviews following its launch. *PC Magazine* praised the overall hardware design and quality of games available at launch.[75] CNET gave an average review rating, noting that while the console lacks a few features offered by its competition, it is relatively inexpensive, has a great controller design, and launched a decent lineup of games.[76] In later reviews, criticism mounted against the console often centering on its overall look and feel, describing it as "toy-ish."[77][78] In the midst of poor sales figures and the associated financial harm to Nintendo, a *Time International* article called the GameCube an "unmitigated disaster".[79]

Retrospectively, Joystiq compared the GameCube's launch window to its successor, the Wii, noting that the GameCube's "lack of games" resulted in a subpar launch, and the console's limited selection of online games damaged its market share in the long run.[80] *Time International* concluded that the system had low sales figures, because it lacked "technical innovations".[81]

Sales

In Japan, between 280,000 and 300,000 GameCube consoles were sold during the first three days of its sale, out of an initial shipment of 450,000 units.[82] During its launch weekend, the GameCube sold $100 million worth of GameCube products in North America.[83] The console was sold out in several stores, selling faster than both of its competitors, the Xbox and the PlayStation 2, had initially sold.[84] The most popular game at the system's launch was *Luigi's Mansion*, which, according to Nintendo, sold more at launch than *Super Mario 64* had.[85] Other popular games include *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader* and *Wave Race: Blue Storm.*[83] By early December 2001, the system had sold 600,000 units in the US.[86]

Nintendo sold 22 million GameCube units worldwide during its lifespan,[5][87] placing it slightly behind the Xbox's 24 million,[88] and well behind the PlayStation 2's 155 million.[89] The GameCube's predecessor, the Nintendo 64, outperformed it as well selling nearly 33 million units.[90] The console was able to outsell the short-lived Dreamcast, however, which yielded 9.13 million unit sales.[91] In September 2009, IGN ranked the GameCube 16th in its list of best gaming consoles of all time, placing it behind all three of its sixth-generation competitors: the PlayStation 2 (3rd), the Dreamcast (8th), and the Xbox (11th).[77] As of March 31, 2003, the GameCube had sold 9.55 million units worldwide, falling short of Nintendo's initial goal of 10 million consoles.[92]

Many of Nintendo's own first-party games, such as *Super Smash Bros. Melee* and *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, saw strong sales, though this did not typically benefit third-party developers or directly drive sales of their games. Many cross-platform games — such as sports franchises released by Electronic Arts — were sold in numbers far below their PlayStation 2 and Xbox counterparts, eventually prompting some developers to scale back or completely cease support for the GameCube. Exceptions include Sega's family friendly *Sonic Adventure 2* and *Super Monkey Ball*, which reportedly yielded more sales on GameCube than most of the company's games on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox.[12] After several years of losing money from developing for Nintendo's console, Eidos Interactive announced in September 2003 that it would end support for the GameCube, canceling several games that were in development.[93] Later, however, Eidos resumed development[94] of GameCube games, releasing hit games such as *Lego Star Wars: The Video Game* and *Tomb Raider: Legend*. In addition, several third-party games originally intended to be GameCube exclusives – most notably *Resident Evil 4* – were eventually ported to other systems in an attempt to maximize profits following lackluster sales of the original GameCube versions.

In March 2003, former UK retailer Dixons, removed all GameCube consoles, accessories and games from its stores.[95] That same month, another UK retailer Argos, cut the price of the GameCube in their stores to £78.99, which was more than £50 cheaper than Nintendo's SRP for the console at the time.[96]

With sales sagging and millions of unsold consoles in stock, Nintendo halted GameCube production for the first nine months of 2003 to reduce surplus units.[79] Sales rebounded slightly after a price drop to US$99.99 on September 24, 2003[97] and the release of *The Legend of Zelda: Collector's Edition* bundle. A demo disc, the *GameCube Preview Disc*, was also released in a bundle in 2003.[98] Beginning with this period, GameCube sales continued to be steady, particularly in Japan, but the GameCube remained in third place in worldwide sales during the sixth generation era because of weaker sales performance elsewhere.[99]

Iwata told investors that the GameCube would sell 50 million units worldwide by March 2005, but by the end of 2006, it had only sold 21.7 million, selling less than half of what Nintendo forecasted.[12]

Market share

With the GameCube, Nintendo failed to reclaim the market share lost by its predecessor, the Nintendo 64. Throughout the lifespan of its console generation, GameCube hardware sales remained far behind its direct competitor the PlayStation 2, and slightly behind the Xbox. The console's "family-friendly" appeal and lack of support from certain third-party developers skewed the GameCube toward younger market, which was a minority demographic of the gaming population during the sixth generation.[100] Many third-party games popular with teenagers or adults, such as the blockbuster *Grand Theft Auto* series and several key first-person shooters, skipped the GameCube entirely in favor of the PlayStation 2 and Xbox.

As of June 2003, the GameCube had a 13% market share, tying with the Xbox in sales but far below the 60% of the PlayStation 2.[79]

Legacy

Many games that debuted on the GameCube, including *Pikmin*, *Chibi-Robo!*, *Metroid Prime*, and *Luigi's Mansion* became popular Nintendo franchises or subseries.[101]

See also

- Dolphin (emulator)
- GameCube technical specifications

- List of best-selling GameCube video games
- GameCube accessories
- Nintendo Selects

Notes

a. Requires the use of the Digital A/V port, which was removed from later models
b. Officially called the **Nintendo GameCube** (Japanese: ニンテンドーゲームキューブ), abbreviated **NGC** in Japan and **GCN** in Europe and North America

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External links

- Official website
- Nintendo GameCube at the Wayback Machine (archived May 1, 2008)
- consolevations.com, for all the console / controller and packaging variations